



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AGRICULTURAL PRESS

BY J. CLYDE MARQUIS,
Editor of "The Country Gentleman," Philadelphia.

The influence which the printed page has had upon agriculture cannot be definitely measured. The idea has been generally accepted that practical and, especially, successful farming has until recently been conducted apart from the directions given in books. The disfavor with which the countryman who considers himself especially practical has regarded those who consult the written experiences of others in books has been too generally dwelt upon in discussions of the literature of agriculture.

The influence of the printed page is particularly subtle. The casual reader often believes that he has received no benefit from an academic treatment of a topic, yet his subsequent methods are indisputable evidence that he has absorbed an idea and adopted the suggestions, even though he believes he has not. To say that the most important single influence for the improvement of agriculture has been the periodical press would be both trite and unnecessary, yet no discussion of the influence of the printed page upon agricultural methods would be complete did it not begin with this premise.

A sketch of the development of agricultural literature is necessary to secure an adequate appreciation of its importance. Its beginnings are unknown, and there were probably treatises on practical agriculture in early periods of Chinese history of which we now have no record. There are only occasional glimpses of the development of the art of husbandry in the early history of man. These appear in Biblical literature and in Egyptian records and later become more evident in the writings of the Greeks and Romans.

The first foundations of the literature of husbandry which may be said to support the present structure were laid by the Roman writers, and many of the fundamental propositions presented by them may still be accepted with trifling modifications. The husband-

men of to-day would be benefited greatly by a thoughtful perusal of the advice of Cato and Columella.

Following the Roman period there is a stretch of centuries until the time when the early English writers appear. Arthur Young has been mentioned as the forerunner of our modern agricultural writings, and he unquestionably set a standard which has been seldom equalled and rarely surpassed in descriptive and helpful writing on rural topics. The awakening which resulted from the entertaining works by Young was the beginning of the agricultural revival in England, and was also coincident with the beginning of modern agriculture in America. The friendly relations between Young and George Washington unquestionably had considerable to do with the popularity of the writings by the former in America.

Among American pioneers were a few capable, foresighted men who appreciated the importance of permanent records in agriculture, and their work is principally to be found in the proceedings of the various agricultural societies then in the forefront of the agricultural advance. Even before the opening of the nineteenth century there was a considerable volume of helpful agricultural literature not only in proceedings of societies but in a few periodicals and in a number of excellent books. Following the opening of the new century the increase in printed matter relating to the farm and the field was steady but slow. Periodicals appeared and after more or less successful careers were absorbed, transformed or abandoned until the end of the first quarter of the century found very little substantial advancement. Beginning about 1830 the quantity and the character of books and journals on agriculture received a considerable impetus. Capable men began to realize that an interchange of ideas was necessary. Books for farmers could no longer satisfy those who were interested in a given subject because of the distribution of the people over a wider area and the growing complexity of rural problems. The earlier journals were published and edited by men of ideals, backed by the courage of accomplishment, who looked upon their journals as agencies for progress rather than mere commercial enterprises. They stood for certain reforms and improvements, and though sometimes radical and extreme in their methods, their purpose was on the whole to improve agriculture, which they unquestionably did.

The three prime divisions of agricultural literature then, as

to-day, were: First, the periodical; second, the public and semi-public document, and third, the book, the three standing in this order as to numbers distributed. Periodicals reach a larger audience than either the proceedings of societies, some of which are private and others semi-public documents, or books which have a more limited circulation but perhaps a greater influence upon those who are actually reached.

As a conclusion of this hasty glance at the development of agricultural literature, we find at the beginning of a new century that periodical literature is most highly developed and specialized, and, in the opinion of many, commercialized to an extreme degree which must sooner or later result in the consolidation or transformation of many journals. With approximately five hundred periodicals devoted to one or many of the phases of agriculture and related topics, the field of periodical literature may be said to be crowded. These numerous periodicals send out literally millions of copies each week, and while a large proportion of the rank and file of rural people do not read a periodical regularly, all are touched directly or indirectly by the ideas thus distributed. Were they properly distributed, there would be several copies each month for each person engaged in agriculture in the entire country. This consistent dissemination of literature, going on as it does without ceasing and with growing force, constitutes the greatest agency for agricultural improvement.

Next in order of importance must be placed the public documents. They have increased in numbers within the last decade with great rapidity, and within the past five years the quantity of reliable free literature for the man on the farm has been almost doubled. There is little doubt that this increase will continue for some time to come. The recognition by the daily newspaper of the importance of agriculture, and consequently the regular appearance of departments concerning such matters is one of the newest and most significant phases of this rapid increase of printed matter on farm topics.

For the books on agriculture there is less to be said. The most valuable works now found in our libraries are the product of the last decade. The tendency for more popular and attractive literature has unquestionably brought down the average quality of the books produced. The new book that will remain authentic for a decade is the exception, yet there are many books now near the

end of their second decade of popularity that continue to meet with a large demand. The character of the new works on agriculture is on the whole entirely helpful, since a new type of literature which is both interesting and instructive is certain to be evolved through the experience of the publishers.

To pass to the social significance of this literature, its improvement in quality and its increase in distribution and in influence are due to the appearance of a generation that is prepared to be benefited by it. As soon as men are trained to put human experience in rural affairs into forceful, convincing writing, the reader will be able to secure more material aid from such writings. The facility with which reliable matter may be secured is the greatest point in favor of its development. We receive our new agricultural thoughts in our daily press along with the news of progress in other industries. The organization of press bureaus within the last few weeks by the agricultural colleges, state experiment stations, boards of agriculture and federal organizations is an important advance step in this direction. Few items of particular significance in agriculture now escape the daily press, and whereas such news was previously written in a form designed to be of general interest, it is now prepared by a special writer often trained in agriculture, so that it is both interesting and accurate.

Plans are in operation in several state experiment stations to send regularly to the local newspapers carefully prepared matter designed to meet local needs. This newspaper matter on agriculture is closely followed by the dissemination of clearly written and attractive circulars and bulletins dealing with special topics. These appear either as reading courses or as separate publications just as the subjects are timely. Bulletins of this character are now being issued regularly by a large number of the leading experiment stations and boards of agriculture, and are being distributed through the mails at farmers' meetings, banks, etc., until the numbers that are actually placed in the hands of working farmers aggregate millions of copies each year. The printed proceedings of state and local associations of stockmen, horticulturists, grain-growers, etc., are distributed to members and others at practically no cost to the recipient. A library comprising literally tons of material, most of it trustworthy, is being assembled by many farmers at absolutely no cost beyond the postage on their letters of request.

The consumption of agricultural books has increased markedly during recent years. The extension of lecture courses into outlying districts has gained the attention of several people who as a consequence become interested in following up these addresses by a careful study of the books written by the same man. Once the working farmer has a taste of the benefits which he can secure from a careful study of such literature he demands large quantities of printed matter.

Much of the agricultural literature of the past decade has been local and specific in that it has dealt with particular problems as they exist in a particular community, and has not been designed to broaden the farmer's social relations. It is noteworthy that a large percentage of the newer literature deals with his social relations; the periodical press as well as books and public documents now deal with social questions. The travelling library, which is growing rapidly in favor in rural communities in many states, now has its quota of good books and bulletins dealing with agriculture. The shelves of the reading-rooms of all kinds of gathering places for country people now bear their burden of the new literature. While much of it falls far below the standards established by the best writers, the influence which it has is on the whole beneficial. Agricultural literature is on the average of as high a quality as the technical literature of any industry, and if judged with consideration of its quantity it perhaps exceeds in interest and helpfulness the average of the printed page of other industries.

The present need is not so much more literature as a better interpretation of farm problems, both economic and social. There is a vast amount of repetition and generalization in present-day writings. New ideas and details are growing less frequent from day to day. In the mass of literature a signboard is needed to point the way for the uninitiated. This interpretation of the printed page is expected to be the next important advance in the field of the literature of the farm.